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ABSTRACT

The author cites resons to be both optimistic and pessimistic about the futures of student personnel work. The basis of his optimism lies in the professional commitment to human learning goals and the expertise to become the instrument of learning valuation at a time when such a reordering of university priorities is probably critical. However, the threat to student personnel work is in its dependence on an interpretation of goals which value propriety over learning, restraint over liveliness, control over order and the status quo over change. This is an interpretation which is passe because it has delivered insufficient support and skill to the development of human potentialities. The major part of this presentation defines and discusses the relevance of five conditions--support, accommodation, access, credibility, and assimilation--which appear necessary to sustain an environment in which learning is valued. (Author/LAA)

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What Future for Student Personnel Work?*

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The question here is what future for student personnel work, not is there a future for student personnel work. It is not that there is no threat to our occupation, because there is such a threat. Rather, a possibility for the future is considered - what we might be doing as we attempt to relate to the experiences of persons in a rapidly changing higher education. There are reasons to be optimistic about the future as well as reasons to perceive threat to our occupation as it is now constituted.

It is my belief that the future of student personnel work is located in this occupation becoming the instrumentality by which the insufficiently valued central function of higher education -- that is, learning -- is valued more highly. My view of learning is that it is a human process in which the abilities of the learner are most fully engaged in change activities rather than learning being just the consequences of schooling. This view of learning is wholly congruent with the goals and competencies of our occupation. The center of student personnel work, if it has had an ethical center at all, has been the concern about what was happening to a class of people who were experiencing the effects of impersonal and rational norms in a context which has a stated commitment to both

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scholarship and learning. We are living in a time when institutions of higher education are becoming less humane than they once were when proportionately more students attended smaller colleges where genuine learning communities could, did and still do exist. Further, it is clear that the skills and commitments it takes to value learning are not in abundant supply on university campuses; nor are the graduate training programs which prepare the overwhelming majority of faculty doing any more than preparing specialists in ever more narrow realms of scholarship. As an occupation, student personnel work has a stated commitment to human learning goals and the expertise to become the instrument of learning valuation at a time when such a reordering of university priorities is probably critical and in a context where no other elders seem to be competing to fulfill such a function. This is the basis for my optimism.

The threat to our occupation, on the other hand, exists as the result of our inability to deliver what our goals say we intend. In the last decade it has become painfully obvious that our activities have had effects which contradict our stated intentions or which are increasingly superfluous. We note that most of our students live most of their real lives outside the purview of any of their elders. We seem to concentrate on students much like ourselves, verbally articulate middle class students, and ignore the invisibly alienated who do not have the skills to gain access to university resources, including us. There are many who believe that our skills have been sold to those who would manipulate students. We have become aware that our helping skills may be used to "adjust"

students to a static environment and to cool the rage which more properly could be addressed to changing the conditions which cause the rage. Some of us are aware of the extent to which our help is dependent upon coercing students to submit to our influence. Students are becoming very difficult to manage and they are increasingly demanding and getting the right to manage their own lives, both individually and collectively. Rule making activities are becoming ever more empty exercises. During crisis situations we were often bypassed as students dealt directly with presidents and boards of trustees. The threat to student personnel work is, in my belief, in its dependence on an interpretation of goals which has valued propriety over learning, restraint over liveliness, control over order and the status quo over change. This is an interpretation which is increasingly passé because it has delivered insufficient support and skill to the development of human potentialities. It is being slowly replaced by structures and roles which increase accountability by elders to students. The old ways of thinking and acting with regard to students cannot survive much accountability to them. It is my belief, then, that the direction of survival of our occupation is to associate ourselves with those forces on the higher educational scene which have the effect of more highly valuing learning. The remainder of this paper addresses itself to understanding the goals of a social technology; the effect of which is to value learning. It is in the realm of discovering and developing this technology that student personnel work may become an instrument of learning valuation and have a future.

Learning is valued when institutional resources and the personal energies of those who populate our institutions of higher education are

deployed in sufficient quantity to elicit change individuals desire -- change which is perceived by them to be in the direction of expanding their human potentialities. Unfortunately, it is apparent that these human and non-human resources are generally enlisted in American higher education in the direction of achieving such outcomes as research productivity, status or credentials, which are, at best, the by-products of education. Like football teams, however, by-products acquire a functional autonomy which gives them the power to motivate behavior apart from the presumably valued learning processes.

The central assumption motivating this paper is that the valuing of by-products occurs because the social technology is not available to permit the building of communities which genuinely value learning. The failure to value learning may very well be the result of not knowing how to do so. Certainly, the issue may be more complex. Assuming ignorance, however, permits considering the topic in a manner which may reveal the nature of the issue, if only to question whether it is possible for institutions to value learning.

The paper will be more immediately concerned with five conditions which appear to be necessary to sustain an environment in which learning is valued. These conditions will be defined and their relevance to learning climates will be discussed.

CONDITIONS

The five conditions are: support, accommodation, access, credibility and assimilation. Support involves the provision of emotional

sustenance to those experiencing the inevitable stress associated with learning. Accommodation refers to the opportunity extended to learners to develop the skills they need in order to take advantage of the resources available in the institution. Access means the absence of obstacles to full participation in institutional life and the presence of the resources necessary to facilitate participation. Credibility refers to the demonstration of trust and confidence in interactions through which persons come together who occupy different roles or who are members of different sub-groups. Assimilation is the process of change in the social conditions of an institution in response to the changing needs of its members and to the inclusion of new members; it is reflected in changing priorities in the use of resources.

SUPPORT

Support involves the provision of emotional sustenance to those experiencing the inevitable stress associated with learning. To be supported means that individuals are sustained by the human and non-human resources which they require. The movement from parochial neighborhoods or encapsulated communities to more pluralistic university environments requires the acceptance of normative changes which, for some, have the effect of "culture shock." The immense size of the institutions in which a majority of college students are enrolled results in anonymous and impersonal structures which have alienating and depersonalizing effects. The rapid pace of change in society generally, problems in interpersonal and group relationships and the developmental problems associated with identity, intimacy and generativity, are additional stress stimuli. The resultant stress is the product of social forces and must eventually be ameliorated through social change. The more immediate outcome is some

type of crisis which has the potential for growth and/or pathology.

The need for support is not a student need alone. Faculty and administrators experience stress also, and require support. Too often, for example, the change of status from graduate student to member of the faculty or an administrator's family problem can send shock waves of stress through university communities with debilitating effect on everyone touched. Anyone involved in teaching and learning may at one time or another require emotional sustenance to direct and use stress productively. A supportive condition is maintained when individuals and/or groups are skillful in the diagnosis of pathology and alienation and legitimize means by which support is delivered.

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation refers to the opportunity extended to learners to develop the skills they need to take advantage of the resources available in the institution. Lazarus (1961) tells us that Piaget used "...the terms accommodation and assimilation to represent the alteration of oneself or the environment, respectively, as a means of adjusting." Thus, accommodation and assimilation are opposite conditions. To involve oneself in activities which lead toward accommodation, means "...accepting whatever exists externally and altering oneself accordingly ...." (Lazarus, 1961)

Accommodation occurs as a result of acting on the need to be included as a functioning member of a learning community. Members may learn about whatever agreements exist as to how persons are to interact, how decisions are made and how resources are allocated; they may get the training which will permit them to learn for themselves and to contribute to the learning of others. A faculty member, for example, may want to

operate more as a consultant to his students than an interrogator but does not know how. A student may want to be able to give a speech without panic or learn to read more quickly. An administrator may need to work on his negotiation skills. White middle-class students might wish to learn skills in dealing with persons from different ethnic groups to avoid confrontations precipitated by ignorance and clumsiness. Poor and minority group students may wish to gain knowledge and skill to enhance survival in an alien environment. Institutions are accommodating to learners when resources are deployed so that individual members learn the skills needed to participate fully in the activities which have meaning to them.

ACCESS

Access means the absence of obstacles to full participation in institutional life and the presence of the resources necessary to facilitate participation. In some cases participation is not a matter of gaining skills but, rather, is related to the operation of a social structure. Bureaucracies can and do become so complicated that individual rights are denied because of organizational procedures and the values such procedures honor. The person, for example, who has the power to right a wrong may never get the information to do so because his subordinates are responsible for protecting him from "petty" matters. In some organizations the bureaucrats with the most "people contact" in their jobs are newly hired and the least well informed, thus honoring the value that distance from "people contact" is good. Delay obscures denial, committees obliterate responsibility, belief and bias hide behind rules. Thus it may be impossible to determine how individual rights are denied. By some manner or means, access is often denied.

Lack of resources can block participation. The availability of persons who have the skills and knowledge necessary for survival and the desire to be helpful is a critical matter for poor and minority group persons. Gottlieb and Campbell (1968) have pointed out that "...poor adolescents do not have access to adults who have the power and desire to assist in the socialization process." People are needed to serve as role models enhancing identification, to give support for needed action and, if necessary, to act for the person who may not have the skills to act for himself. Social structures can operate so that resource persons are made unavailable through role distance, language difference or bias. Time, space, knowledge, power, and money are other resources which, if unavailable or in scarce supply, can deny participation. Institutions are accessible when obstacles resulting in alienation are absent and resources are present to facilitate participation by all members in the life of the institution.

CREDIBILITY

Credibility refers to the demonstration of trust and confidence in those interactions where persons come together who occupy different roles or who are members of different sub-groups. Members may fail to maintain support, accommodation and access conditions because they do not trust other members. Role stereotypes (e.g., "the establishment" or "the kids") abound in university communities and result in communication blocks. Adversary relationships among role, ethnic and interest groups are based on theories that the other group is evil, conspiratorial and pugnacious. Instead, the other group may be ignorant, unskilled and

fearful. Few feel comfortable with cross-role, open and equal status relationships. Faculty and administrative members tend to take dominating postures, to be threatened by the domination of others (unless the ones dominating are their "superiors") and coerce or patronize students. Students tend to fake submissiveness in their relationships with faculty and administrators, though rage, passivity and separatism are also common reactions. Many tend to believe that no other group or role occupant practices what they preach. Everyone, as Morris Keeton (1970) suggests, feels disenfranchised from the governance function of the university.

Credibility refers to the immediate congruence of talk and action, intention and effect and to the dependability of such congruence over time. "Can I believe what you are saying now?" and "Will you honor it later?" are the key questions as to credibility. Role stereotyping and adversary relationships are so common that in cross-role interactions lack of credibility is assumed.

Credibility is a requirement for access to the lives of youth. Since in Seeley's (1962) analysis, youth fear not attack but a "seduction they more than half desire" elders are in a difficult position. They are required to take the initiative in demonstrating their trustworthiness, but in the subtle world of seduction the need of the elder to be needed is suspect. The question of why the elder desires access is raised by the young. Patronizing, coercive and defensive behaviors on the part of elders give away their failure to come to terms with this question. Such behavior renders them non-credible.

Credibility appears to require elders to recognize that they do not know how youth should live their lives; that things have changed and are ever changing; that there is some help elders themselves could use in knowing how to live their own lives under these changing circumstances; that older people may have some skills and knowledge which help them and may help others with the process of choice making, but that the skills and knowledge of older people may not be relevant to others until their efficacy is demonstrated in the way elders live their lives and <u>treat</u> others rather than in the way they <u>teach</u> others to live their lives. Bennis (1970) indicates some additional considerations for those elders who would influence youth:

> ...the young have differing expectations toward leadership. It strikes me that they are developing a new metaphor for leadership, and it is not a liberal one. One of its aspects is the ability of the new culture leader to be direct, authentic, withstand hostility, and even take ridicule.
>
> The young are demanding that as leaders, we know where our moral and ethical center is. I don't think the new culture is going to stand for a petite Eichmanism and they are not going to stand for administrators saying, "well I'm a part of the administration, I don't like it myself, but still I have to do it." I think it is going to be more and more important for liberals over (and under) forty to think about a whole host of issues that, for the most part, they have not wanted to think too deeply about.

The foregoing analysis has centered on the credibility of elders because the lack of elder credibility is itself a major obstacle in the development of learning communities. Many elders are unaware of the implications of social changes either for the needs of youth or for relationships with them. Since elders are in control of many university resources, resources tend to be used for purposes which are not of interest to young people, thus failing to reach the young. Credibility is achieved

when members are able to behave authentically with one another, display social awareness rather than ethnocentrism and actively deal with the social realities attendant upon their interaction with others.

ASSIMILATION

Assimilation is the process of change in the social conditions of an institution in response to the changing needs of its members and to the inclusion of new members. Assimilation is reflected in the changing priorities in the use of resources. The social arrangements of people--the implicit agreements about how they relate to one another and how they decide the issues in their lives together--may have positive or negative effects on the health and development of community members. Are differences, for example, adjudicated so that one group "wins" and another is excluded? What is the effect on the losers? On the winners? Are coercion and power the means by which adjudication is accomplished? Do the means advance or retard self-renewal in the institution? Increase or diminish individual pathological behavior? Stimulate or block learning?

Bauer's (1966) discussion of policy formation suggests the notion that in human intercourse continuing conflicts of interest will occur. Conflict resolution is not a matter of making conflict disappear or a matter of what is best morally, traditionally or scientifically in any absolute sense but rather a matter of thinking and acting politically--that is, finding (through negotiation, he suggests) courses of action and arrangements with which all parties are willing to live. The processes used to resolve problems of difference, distance and threat among members

in ways that all members can live with the resolution and maintain status can provide the energy for institutional growth. Problems may be seen positively as the agenda for institutional growth. Unfortunately, few have the joy expressed by Dmitri Sologdin in Solzhenitsyn's The First Circle (1968).

> In the realm of the unknown, difficulties must be viewed as a hidden treasure! Usually the more difficult, the better. It is not as valuable if your difficulties stem from your own inner struggle. But when difficulties arise out of increasing objective resistance, that's marvelous!.... Overcoming the increased difficulties is all the more valuable because in failure the growth of the person performing the task takes place in proportion to the difficulty encountered!

Fear of difference, halting change processes, power-oriented decision-making, violent (mostly figurative) methods of conflict resolution are more often than not characteristic of political processes in higher educational institutions. Such conditions detract from the extent to which an institution can renew itself. They breed social conditions debilitating to the social health and restrictive of the development of its members. The caste system, for example, which operates in most colleges and universities, separates faculty and administrators from students and both from non-academic staff, and creates myths of omnipotence and powerlessness.

Spiegel (1969) describes this as:

> ...the pyramidal structuring of power in our bureaucracies, and in our communities--a stratification that arranges persons and groups in positions of inferiority and superiority .... (the effect of which is) the destructive impact of authoritarianism and elitism in a self-advertised democracy.

The result is the unwillingness and inability of members to participate in open and equal status learning activity. Nor is there much possibility

of developing the incentive to change non-violently the social conditions perpetuating the caste system. The relationship of omnipotence and powerlessness to individual pathological behavior is evident in the rage, depression, self-destructive and fantasy behaviors common among "troubled" youth.

Resistance to change, however, is the response of a healthy organism. Not all change is renewal. The inclusion of some persons can mean the destruction of an institution. Some methods are cancerous to organizations. Changing goals may deny an organization's authentic rationale for existence. Resistance to change suggests that desirable assimilation should be a process of action and reaction, where differences, distances and threats are worked through. When the needs of the members are reflected in organizational arrangements when the social conditions provide humane environments for learning and when the structure processes change, desirable assimilation is taking place.

To summarize, five conditions have been examined which are seen as necessary to sustain an environment in which learning is valued. It has been asserted that one explanation for the valuing of by-products rather than learning itself is that we do not know how to do otherwise. In effect, we do not have the social technology to produce those conditions which would support learning. Clarifying the nature of those conditions serves as the first step in either developing such a technology or questioning the expectations that our institutions of higher education could or should value learning. Stating these conditions answers the question of what a social technology is supposed to accomplish as well as providing a basis for the evaluation of current practice, resulting, hopefully, in a stimulation of critique, innovation and research.

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